



a tribute to Bev Oda

First elected to Parliament in 2004 and re-elected in 2006, 2008 and 2011. In February of 2006 she was appointed Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, previous to this she served as Opposition Critic for Canadian Heritage. In 2007 she was appointed Minister of international Cooperation, responsible for Canada's overseas humanitarian aid and development assistance through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), making her the longest serving minister in this portfolio in Canadian history. During her tenure as Minister she traveled to 32 countries, some multiple times.



In Her Riding



Afghanistan



Japan



Haiti



East Africa



The Clarington Promoter is pleased to take the opportunity to say thank you to the Hon. Bev Oda, P.C. for serving her constituency both within its borders and representing Canada around the World.

Q & A With The Honourable Bev Oda, PC

Q: During your time as the MP for Durham, you were an official opposition critic and a Minister of the Crown. What were your responsibilities in these roles, particularly as the Minister for International Cooperation?

A: I am grateful for the opportunity to serve Durham and to serve Canada. In addition to my role as the MP for Durham, as a Minister and a member of Cabinet, I was a member of the Queen's Privy Council and a member of the Prime Minister's national security committee. I was responsible for Canada's international aid policies, development programs and a \$3 billion annual budget. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which was my department, does not implement programs itself but makes recommendations and gives advice to the Minister on which organizations and projects should be funded. This meant working with other countries, numerous international and Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In some of your travels, you saw first hand the horrors of earthquakes, floods, famine and conflict. What did you learn and how has that affected you?

Over the past 5 years, natural disasters and conflict have increased in frequency and severity, some striking developed countries such as the USA or Japan and others hitting developing countries such as Haiti, Burma and in East Africa. I learnt that each crisis is unique. In developing countries, where the most basic necessities of life - food, water and shelter - are limited, the impacts of the disasters can be devastating. I learnt that reaching the victims, assessing the damage, transporting supplies, and providing food and appropriate medicines was challenging and called for tremendous cooperation among countries and organizations as well as strong local leadership.

In my visits to the affected areas, I met victims and witnessed realities for which life in Canada had not prepared me. There were moments when I was overcome and felt helpless. The strength and resiliency of those who were facing starvation and death and had lost everything as well as their determination to survive humbled me. I believe I have seen humanity in some of its most desperate moments, and also in its most courageous. This has deepened my belief that we are truly fortunate to be Canadian.



Q: Your job called upon you to travel hundreds of thousands of miles. For most of us, air travel has ceased to be a pleasure and is now more of a challenge. How does a Minister deal with this and do the airlines also lose your luggage?

A: Going to 32 countries in 5 years, was demanding, particularly since the majority of the trips had to be over weekends or holidays, and included a full busy schedule of meetings and site visits once in the country. Many of the countries were remote, such as Afghanistan, Peru and Mongolia, and difficult to reach. In some cases, I spent more time in transit than in the country itself.

My 3-day trip to Sri Lanka to visit refugee camps included 23 hours in transit, 6 stops on 3 different airlines and 4 different airports each way. The hours in Sri Lanka included 2 hours of rest, a 2-hour drive to the camps, the camp tour and 4 meetings when back in the capital city. This meant virtually going around the world in 72 hours and being in the House of Commons the next morning.

As for lost luggage, I remember my trip to the East Africa famine. We flew from Ottawa to Toronto to Amsterdam where our flight to Kenya was cancelled. We then flew to London and changed airlines resulting in lost luggage. Finally in Kenya after 19 hours in transit, we had a store open up at 10:30 p.m. so we could buy some clothes for our 5:30 am flight and a full day at the refugee camp.



Q: As a Cabinet Minister, you have had the opportunity to meet a great number of people, ranging from the very well known to individuals living in extreme poverty as well as disaster victims. Is there any one person who has left a lasting and profound impression?

A: It's difficult to pick any one person. I've been fortunate enough to work with Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers from numerous countries, heads of the United Nations and its agencies, leaders of international and Canadian organizations, academics and researchers as well as dedicated foreign and local people working in the developing countries. Their dedication and commitment, their intellect and their own personal sacrifice was inspiring. However, I must say that I was most inspired by the women living in the countries and communities that I visited.

I admire the women and girls in Afghanistan who continue to strive and hope for a better future despite having been oppressed for decades, and who, even today, are faced with death threats, acid attacks and continued abuse. I admire the mothers in Africa and Asia, many of whom are still girls, who struggle under the harshest of conditions, work so hard and make the most difficult decisions so their children can survive. I learnt that by supporting women, all children, not only boys will be educated, children and families will be healthier and communities will be more stable. I believe that investing Canada's aid dollars in women reaps real value for our aid dollars.



Q: Your long-term career was in the private sector; you have also given many years to the volunteer sector and the past 8 years to public service. What's next for Bev Oda?

A: I expect there will be a period of adjustment as a retiree, and I look forward to spending lost time with my family and friends while renewing my interests in gardening, crafts and the arts. But, I have a feeling that there may be a way - sometime in the future - that I might continue some public service, particularly in sharing what I have learnt during my time as Canada's Minister for International Cooperation. I'm grateful for each opportunity I've been given throughout my life and I'm stronger from each experience. I continue to be blessed with the support of my family and friends, so am I finished? I don't think so.



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Q: During your time as the Minister for International Cooperation, you made some difficult decisions and made changes at CIDA. What were your objectives and what did you do?

A: The Prime Minister gave me a mandate to make our international assistance more effective. I set out to make it more focused, to maximize the value of our aid dollars and to target our support in areas where Canada could make a real difference in the lives of those we intended to help. This caused changing some of our funding directions and change is always difficult. For example, I eliminated funding the promotion, fund-raising and lobbying activities of organizations here in Canada, and focused on program delivery and getting results in developing countries. Some organizations - those that were largely dependent on government support - were able to adjust, others were not.

With Cabinet support, I was able to increase CIDA's budget to the highest level in its 40-year history. I brought in measures to increase the buying power of our aid dollars by 30 - 35%, resulting in more food for the hungry, more healthcare, and more kids in schools. I also knew that Canada had expertise and experience that we could share with developing countries. I called upon organizations such as the Association of Canadian Community Colleges to focus on building vocational and training schools, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to help strengthen local governments and the Toronto Sick Kids Hospital to train pediatric nurses and doctors. Ultimately, I wanted to ensure that our international assistance was going to the purposes Canadians expected, efficiently and effectively.

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Q: Over the past 5 years, you were responsible for over \$1.5 trillion in total, an agency of more than 2000 public servants and Canada's role to reduce global poverty and help improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable people. What are you most proud of?

A: For me, our work in two countries, Haiti and Afghanistan, stand out. I'm particularly proud of our work after the earthquake in Haiti, being one of the first countries on the ground playing a leadership role in the worldwide response to that disaster. I'm proud of our work in Afghanistan, CIDA's largest development mission. By refurbishing the largest dam in southern Afghanistan, thousands now have better access to water and the region is once again becoming one of the country's most productive agricultural areas. Our work to help Afghan women and girls receive better healthcare, get an education and take part in life outside of the home meant the most to me.

And, I'm proud that Canada is now the 2nd largest single country supporter of the World Food Program and of the role we played during and after the food crisis in 2008. Because of Canada's G8 commitment to improve the health of mothers and infants, today more mothers are surviving childbirth and more babies are surviving their first 2 years of life. Over the past 4 years, Canada led the way in accountability so that all donor countries have now agreed to fulfill their pledges and promises made at conferences as well as report on how aid dollars are spent. Things that were never part of the international development system prior to Canada's G8 Summit. There is so much to be proud of. Canadians are a compassionate people and my responsibility was to ensure the best use of public funds to help those in other countries.



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